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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 000372

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CR, SCA/PB
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR KIMMITT
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD
RELEASABLE TO NATO/ISAF/AUST/NZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [MASS](#) [SOCI](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PRT NURISTAN: SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT ON SECURITY,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL SITUATION

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Nuristan Province has traditionally been neglected and remains underdeveloped, but recent initiatives by Governor Tamin are energizing district administrations and encouraging communities to take responsibility for their own security. Despite these efforts, security remains problematic as anti-government elements continue to operate in the province. An unprecedented number of big-ticket public work construction projects are due to start in the coming months. The economy and infrastructure of the province and region are poised to undergo an unprecedented transformation that will bring new opportunities and benefit to even the most remote villages. Education and health care have seen little improvement. Civil society organizations are not present, and the condition of women is unchanged: they have scant opportunities to do anything other than engage in traditional subsistence activities. End Summary.

Small, Neglected, Undeveloped

¶2. (SBU) Nuristan province, which by population is Afghanistan's smallest, remains largely neglected and undeveloped. It has nothing that could be considered even a small town and no commercial or trading center. Its proximity to Pakistan, its rugged, forested terrain and limited government presence contribute to it being a sanctuary for anti-government groups that enjoy some local support in some areas. The basis and extent of this support are key issues for the government and the Coalition/ISAF.

Security

¶3. (SBU) Anti-government activity continues in the provinc, but hostile contacts fell to a low level during January.

Winter's cold, short days and snow could account for the lull, but others suggest that it may be the result of a recent security initiative by the governor in eastern Nuristan.

¶4. (SBU) Nuristani sources report that Coalition/IASF operations which eliminated high value targets in a November raid in Mondagal, Kamdesh district, and a January strike against three insurgents in western Nuristan delivered a message: enemies no longer can operate with impunity in the province, and the Coalition/IASF's ability to find them is growing more effective. According to one well-informed Nuristani source, the Mondagal operation brought a new willingness among the residents in the east to oppose insurgents who had previously operated without fear of consequences.

¶5. (SBU) Insecurity in Nuristan has not deterred PRT operations, but it had largely stopped activities of UN organizations, international NGOs and implementing organizations. Only a few international NGOs operate in the province, and none has a permanent presence with expatriate staff. Afghans working for international organizations have been targeted in the past, but there were no significant incidents in the second half of 2006. Nor were there incidents that targeted Afghan officials, schools or clinics or attacks against populations.

¶6. (SBU) Afghan government law enforcement and security agencies have a limited presence in the province and contribute little to security and the rule of law. The Afghan National Police (ANP) command little respect and are seen to be ineffective. Border police operate from a base in

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Bargimatal district, but they lack the means to control the border with Pakistan. The Afghan National Army (ANA) which is more respected than the police is only present in a few locations where they work with Coalition/IASF units. The ANA intends to extend its presence in Nuristan by building at least one post in Qala Gush.

¶7. (SBU) The situation of the ANP is Nuristan is dire. With their low pay and primitive facilities, most patrolmen insist on serving only in their home districts. They reside at home, allowing them to eke out a living on their paltry wages. But because they are working in their own communities and often musQdeal with their relatives, they often find it difficult to be even-handed and impartial. Complaints are common about police officers who exploit their positions for personal gain and about patrolmen who ignore orders and the law in order to protect the interests of their relatives. In response to proposals that would keep rank and file police from serving in their home districts, objections are raised that they cannot serve at distant posts because they lack adequate housing and they will be away from their families. In early 2007, as a result of national reform effort, more professional police officers are being assigned at both the provincial and district levels in Nuristan. In addition, plans are being refined to start recruitment and training in order to deploy, in the near future, 550 auxiliary police who have been authorized for the province. ANP training is a positive step, but, by itself only marginally improves the capacity and effectiveness of this troubled force.

¶8. (SBU) Last November, Governor Tamim launched an initiative to mobilize councils to take responsibility for security in their region. He spent several weeks in early winter organizing a "security" council comprised of 45 elders and religious leaders from Nuristan's two eastern districts. The council agreed to visit communities in these districts in order to deliver the message that Jihad is not now justified, that communities must take responsibility for their own security, and that villages will not receive development projects unless they bar anti-government groups from operating on their lands. Besides sending his deputy to ensure that the council would follow through in its

commitments, the governor promised to return in the spring to evaluate the council's performance. He has expressed his intention to set up similar councils elsewhere in the province.

Politics

¶9. (SBU) The eastern Nuristan security council was one example of the sharply increased activity by the governor and his immediate staff in late 2006. These efforts strengthened support for his administration, the Afghan government and the Coalition/IASF. Tamim earned praise for naming new administrators for every district and for getting involved in settling some long-festered disputes between communities. He dispatched his deputy and several other provincial officials to work on settling a bloody, disruptive 14-year conflict between Kamdesh and Kushtoz villages in eastern Nuristan. Tamim also sought to shake up and energize district-level administration through personnel changes. Other than the governor and his staff, however, the provincial administration appears to be ineffective: the Provincial Council is not active, and many line ministry positions for the province are vacant or the incumbents are seldom at their jobs.

¶10. (SBU) Popular sentiment about the provincial administration hinges on the services it provides. Support for the national government depends on this and also on intangibles, particularly perceptions of the legitimacy of the national leader, his character, integrity, and conduct. On all these counts Nuristanis continue to hold President

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Karzai in high esteem. While to some extent Karzai benefits from low expectations of national leadership, the perception is widespread in Nuristan that he has brought relative stability and development.

¶11. (SBU) Despite enemy activities in Nuristan, support for the opposition does not appear strong. When asked, most Nuristanis profess their indifference or outright hostility to the opposition and their agenda. Yet, even in this context, in many parts of Nuristan, the opposition is tolerated and even supported. This appears driven more by fear based on intimidation or material considerations than by conviction. The minority in Nuristan who oppose the government employ a variety of strategies. Some feign support for the government to benefit from projects and economic opportunities. Others take a low-key, non-confrontational approach, expecting the tide to turn, with the government foundering and the Coalition/IASF withdrawing. Others actively support or participate in armed confrontation.

¶12. (SBU) Information from many different sources suggests that support for the government is growing while the appeal of the opposition is weakening. Factors for this include the Coalition's successes over the opponents, increased provincial administration activity, and recognition of the prospects of receiving humanitarian assistance and development projects.

Economics

¶13. (SBU) Despite the dramatic changes that have transformed Afghanistan since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban, most Nuristanis have seen few changes to their difficult lives. They continue to practice the same subsistence activities as generations of ancestors: transhumant small-animal pastoralism and intensive cereal cultivation on postage-stamp sized irrigated fields built on steeply terraced hillsides. The province has no paved roads, only a handful of secondary

schools, and no public telephone system. Nuristan, however, is endowed with extensive valuable natural resources, particularly dense coniferous forests in the eastern and central regions and abundant deposits of semi-precious gems and minerals -- which are illegally mined and smuggled out of the country bringing little benefit to Nuristanis or the Afghan government.

¶14. (U) In Nuristan, like most regions of Afghanistan, the public sector has contributed little to the economy. That is about to change dramatically. Plans for major projects, funded or mediated through the public sector are poised to inject massive amounts of money into the province's largely non-monetized economy. A USAID-sponsored Alternate Livelihoods Cobblestone Road, Cash-for-Work project in Nurgram district is already underway and needs more workers than are available locally. That project, which started in October 2006, will provide over 75,000 worker days of pay. Work on the five multi-million dollar road projects managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Nuristan are planned to start in the coming months. Each project will hire thousands of local unskilled laborers allowing their households to accumulate cash, in many cases for the first time. Unfortunately, with Nuristan largely lacking anything except subsistence economic activities, there are few opportunities for this cash to circulate and generate added economic benefit in the province.

¶15. (U) Beyond the work and earnings that these projects provide, these resulting roads will bring material changes to the people's lives by facilitating commerce, and creating opportunities for new transport and commercial services and even new productive ventures. Because the roads will lower

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transport costs, they should reduce the price of goods even in the remote communities which lie far beyond the reach of the roads. On the negative side, the roads will also make it easier to engage in illegal activities, particularly the smuggling of timber and gems and semi-precious stones extracted from unregulated mines.

¶16. (U) Many small-scale development projects have been undertaken by the National Solidarity Program, NGOs and the U.S. military. While they have improved the lives and livelihoods for residents of those communities where they are located, their effect on the overall well-being of the people in the province has been marginal. Most Nuristani communities are not accessible from the existing roads and paths that can be negotiated by pack animals so have not benefited from such projects.

Cultural/Social Situation

¶17. (U) Conditions for the people in Nuristan have changed little. There are only a handful of secondary schools, none for girls. Most schools lack purpose-built structures. Eight hundred of the 1300 teachers are described as having no formal teacher training. Health care facilities are rudimentary. The province has no hospital and most communities are hours or days distant from even a basic health clinic. Civil society organizations do not exist other than informal gatherings to address specific issues or problems. Nuristan's mountains militate against the population developing a common identity, defining common interests or engaging in joint effort.

¶18. (U) Few opportunities exist for women other than engaging in the subsistence activities practices by their mothers and grandmothers. The relatively greater influence of strict Islam practices, promulgated by religious leaders trained at madrassas in Pakistan has resulted in more restrictions on women including veiling. However, because most communities in Nuristan are constructed in a manner where the houses are

not surrounded by walls, and because Nuristani women typically are responsible for agriculture and other essential tasks such as collecting wood from the hillsides, it is not possible to restrict women to the confines of their residences as is typical in many other parts of Afghanistan.
NEUMANN